

REMARKS

In response to the Examiner's Action dated July 31, 2001 (Paper No. 5), please enter the following amendments and remarks. Claims 1-67 are pending and have been examined. Claims 1-67 stand rejected. Claims 1-19, 24-26, 29-31, 34-36, 39-41, 44, and 51-61 have been amended. Reconsideration of Claims 1-67 in view of the following amendments and remarks is respectfully requested.

The Objection to the Declaration Under 37 C.F.R. § 1.67(a)

The Examiner objects to the Declaration for not identifying a post office address for each inventor. Applicants respectfully submit the Declaration is not defective. According to 37 C.F.R. § 1.63(c)(1), the mailing address and the residence of each inventor needs to be stated separately only if they are different. Because each inventor has the same mailing and residence address, the Declaration is not defective for stating the mailing address is the "same." Furthermore, the mailing address is contained within the four corners of the Declaration, and is clearly identifiable. Accordingly, withdrawal of the objection is respectfully requested.

The Objection to the Specification for Informalities

The Examiner objects to the specification for not updating the status of the referenced applications. The specification has now been amended to include the status of the applications that have matured into patents. No new matter has been added. Accordingly, withdrawal of the objection is respectfully requested.

The Objection to the Specification Under 37 C.F.R. § 1.71

The Examiner objects to the specification because the specification purportedly fails to provide support for Claims 4, 9, 14, 19, 29, 34, 39, 44, 52, 55, 58, and 61.

Applicants understand the Examiner is stating that the specification does not support a limitation reciting that a "binder" can be both a fiber and a wet strength agent, and thus, these

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claims are directed to new matter. The applicants respectfully disagree. On page 12, line 31, of the original application 09/137,503, "binder" is stated as referring to a system. Further, on page 13, lines 1-3, binders are described as including thermoplastic and thermosetting materials, soluble bonding mediums used in combination with solvents, and wet strength agents. Accordingly, the claims find support in the specification, and withdrawal of the objection is respectfully requested.

The Rejection of Claims 4, 9, 14, 19, 29, 34, 39, 44,  
52, 55, 58, and 61 Under 35 U.S.C. § 112, First Paragraph

Claims 4, 9, 14, 19, 29, 34, 39, 44, 52, 55, 58, and 61 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, first paragraph, as containing subject matter which was not described in the specification in such a way as to reasonably convey to one skilled in the relevant art that the inventors, at the time the application was filed, had possession of the claimed invention. This rejection is based on the objection to the specification under § 1.71. Applicants submit these claims are allowable for the reasons set forth above. In any event, the claims have been amended, therefore this rejection is now moot.

The Rejection of Claims 1-67 Under 35 U.S.C. § 112, Second Paragraph

Claims 1-67 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite for failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter which applicants regard as the invention. The applicants submit that all the claims meet the requirement of § 112, second paragraph. The fulfillment of this requirement should take into consideration the content of the application, the teaching of the prior art, and the interpretation given the claims by one of ordinary skill. Based on these points, applicants respectfully submit that the claims are not indefinite. In any event, some of the claims have been amended to expedite the withdrawal of the rejections and the issuance of a patent, and not for any reason related to patentability.

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With respect to Claims 1, 6, 11, 16, 26, 31, 36, 41, 51, 54, 57, and 60, the Examiner states that there is no antecedent basis for "the first and second strata." The applicants respectfully disagree. Lack of antecedent basis means that a claim is indefinite when it contains words or phrases whose meaning is unclear. Furthermore, the failure to provide explicit antecedent basis for terms does not always render a claim indefinite. If the scope of a claim would be reasonably ascertainable by those skilled in the art, then the claim is not indefinite. Applicants respectfully submit that the phrase "first and second strata" is reasonably ascertainable by those skilled in the art because first and second stratum have been recited in the claim before the objectionable phrase appears. In any event, the claims have been amended, making this rejection moot.

With respect to Claims 2, 7, 12, and 17, the Examiner states that these claims are indefinite because it is not clear to which of the strata "hydrophobic fibers" is referring. Applicants respectfully disagree. In any event, these claims have been amended, making the rejection moot.

With respect to Claims 3, 8, 13, and 18, the Examiner states that these claims are indefinite because it is not clear whether applicants are limiting a member of a Markush group or limiting the second stratum to one of the members and further defining it. Applicants respectfully submit these claims are not indefinite. In any event, these claims have been amended, making the rejection moot.

With respect to Claims 4, 9, 14, 19, 29, 34, 39, 44, 52, 55, 58, and 61, the Examiner states that these claims are indefinite because it is not clear which binder of the first or second stratum the claims are referring. Applicants respectfully submit these claims are not indefinite. In any event, the claims have been amended, making this rejection moot.

With respect to Claims 5, 10, 15, 30, 35, 40, 53, 56, and 59, the Examiner states that these claims are indefinite because the claims can be interpreted to be more than one article.

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Applicants respectfully submit the claims are not indefinite. In any event, the claims have been amended making the rejection moot.

With respect to Claims 24, 25, 49, 50, 66, and 67, the Examiner states that these claims are indefinite because it is not clear to which of the strata "hydrophilic fibers" is referring and whether the fibers of the second stratum are hydrophilic as opposed to being another member of the Markush group. Applicants respectfully submit the claims are not indefinite. In any event, with respect to Claims 24 and 25, these claims have been amended making the rejection moot. With respect to Claims 49, 50, 66 and 67, these claims recite "hydrophilic fibers" with respect to the distribution stratum, therefore these claims are clearly not indefinite.

The Rejection of Claims 1, 2, 4-7, 9-12, 14, 15, 26, 27,  
29-32, 34-37, 39, and 40 Under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b)

Claims 1, 2, 4-7, 9-12, 14, 15, 26, 27, 29-32, 34-37, 39, and 40 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by Young, Sr. et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,188,624). Claims 1, 6, 11, 26, 31, and 36 have been amended.

As now claimed, the invention recites a *unitary* composite having a first stratum and a second stratum, each including a binder. This recitation is supported in the specification as originally filed on page 4, lines 12-15. The composite is "unitary in that the strata are integrally connected through a transition zone." The commingled fibers of the transition zone are commingled during the composite's formation and prior to the ultimate formation of the stratified composite. This is in contrast to the fibers of the layers of a laminate, which are not commingled in the same manner.

In the claimed invention, commingling of the fibers in the transition zone results from the deposition of the components of one stratum onto the components of the other stratum. See page 18, lines 27-35. In one instance, the deposition process involves the laying down of fibrous

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streams, which correspond to the first and second strata, onto a foraminous support. Deposition of the first and second strata can occur either sequentially or simultaneously. Turbulence accompanies the deposition of the streams and mixing of the stream's components occurs. The mixing of components ultimately results in the formation of the composite's transition zone and the commingling of fibers. See page 19, lines 9-20. The transition zone provides advantages not seen with absorbent products formed from separate and distinct layers (e.g. laminates). See page 8, lines 27-32.

In contrast to the claimed invention, the Young reference describes a laminate formed from distinct and separate layers that are bonded and densified only after the formation of each layer. The laminate is not unitary because it does not achieve commingling of fibers with the deposition of layer components. This view of the reference is clearly supported by the language of the reference itself. For example, in column 7, lines 15-23, the reference describes the dispersion pad and insert pad being separately formed and then assembled into a composite pad, with thermal bonding and densification of the pads being accomplished before assembly (into a laminate). And, "entanglement of these fibers may for example, be achieved by compressing the two pads together." Fairly read, this passage describes separately forming the insert pad and the dispersion pad, and then the fibers within each pad are bonded. This is followed by bonding of the insert and dispersion pads together and only then does densification occur by compressing the pads together. Further support for this interpretation of the reference is found on column 16, lines 25-36, wherein the reference describes the formation of the dispersion pad by airlaying onto a conveyor. Subsequently, the insert pad is airlaid onto the dispersion pad. The combined pads are passed through a pair of nip rolls to mechanically compress the two pads together. Thereafter, the combined pads are passed through a thermobonder so that the two pads are bonded together simultaneously with the bonding of the insert pad fibers. The fact that Young

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must mechanically compress the layers to provide the laminate demonstrates that claimed unitary composite is novel and not anticipated by the reference.

Furthermore, applicants submit that, in contrast to the claimed invention, which recites a transition zone comprising fibers from the first and second strata commingled substantially uniformly, the structure of the laminate of the cited reference includes a mere interface. Such interfaces are discussed in the background of the instant specification as not providing the desirable qualities of the claimed invention. The disadvantages of multi-layered, non-unitary absorbent products are described in the instant specification on page 2, line 19-22.

For a reference to be anticipatory, the reference must exactly describe the claimed invention. Because the reference fails to describe an absorbent unitary composite having a first and second strata, and a transition zone having fibers from the first and the second strata commingled substantially uniformly across the composite's width and along the composite's length, the reference is not anticipatory. Accordingly, withdrawal of the rejection is respectfully requested.

The claimed invention is not obvious in view of the reference. Obviousness requires a suggestion or motivation either in the reference or in the knowledge generally available to modify the reference or combine references, in addition to teaching each and every element of the claimed invention. The cited reference fails to provide a teaching or suggestion to make a unitary composite having a transition zone with fibers from a first and second strata commingled with one another. If a reference distinctly teaches away from the claimed invention, the invention is not obvious over the reference. Because the reference teaches the application of mechanical densification to achieve laminate formation, applicants submit that the reference fails to teach, suggest, or otherwise render obvious the claimed invention.

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The Rejection of Claims 3, 8, 13, 28, 33, 38, and 51-59 Under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a)

Claims 3, 8, 13, 28, 33, 38, and 51-59 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Young, Sr. et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,188,624) in view of Graef et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,225,047).

The Examiner states that the Young reference discloses the invention as substantially claimed. Applicants respectfully disagree with this conclusion. The Examiner further states that the reference does not disclose the cellulose fibers as being crosslinked cellulose fibers. However, the Examiner states that the Graef reference discloses crosslinked cellulose fibers and that it would have been obvious to one of skill in the art to combine these teachings to arrive at the claimed invention.

Claims 3, 8, 13, 28, 33, and 38 depend from an independent claim that recites an "absorbent unitary composite." The deficiencies of the teachings of the Young reference are not cured by the teaching of the Graef reference. The Graef reference fails to describe, at least, the "unitary composite" element of the claimed invention. Accordingly, withdrawal of the rejection of these claims is respectfully requested.

Claims 51-59 likewise recite an "absorbent unitary composite," which has been shown not to be taught or suggested by the Young reference, either alone or in combination with the Graef reference. Accordingly, withdrawal of the rejection is respectfully requested.

The Provisional Double Patenting Rejections

The Examiner has provisionally rejected some of the claims under 35 U.S.C. § 101 as claiming the same invention contained in copending Application No. 09/137,503. Claims 1, 26, and 51 have been amended. As now claimed, the present invention is not the same as claimed in the '503 application. In the event the Examiner now considers them obvious, a terminal disclaimer is enclosed herewith.

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The Examiner has provisionally rejected Claims 1-67 under the judicially created doctrine of obviousness-type double patenting over some of the claims of several co-pending applications. A terminal disclaimer is enclosed herewith. Accordingly, applicants respectfully request withdrawal of all the rejections.

The Allowable Subject Matter of Claims 16-25, 41-50 and 60-67

The Examiner's indication of the allowability of Claims 16-25, 41-50 and 60-67 is noted with appreciation. In view of the amendments and remarks herein, applicants respectfully submit these claims are now allowable.

CONCLUSION

In view of the foregoing amendments and remarks, applicants respectfully submit that Claims 1-67 are in condition for allowance. If any issues remain that may be expeditiously addressed in a telephone interview, the Examiner is encouraged to telephone applicants' attorney at 206.695.1755.

Respectfully submitted,

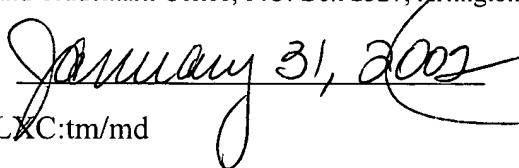
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January 31, 2002

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VERSION WITH MARKINGS TO SHOW CHANGES MADE JANUARY 31, 2002

In the Specification:

The paragraph beginning at page 10, line 34, has been amended as follows:

Although not to be construed as a limitation, other examples of pretreating fibers include the application of fire retardants to the fibers, or treatments with surfactants or other liquids, such as water or solvents, which modify the surface of the fibers. See, for example, U.S. patent application Serial No. 08/669,406, now U.S. Patent No. 5,837,627, filed July 3, 1996, and entitled "Fibrous Web Having Improved Strength and Method of Making the Same." Still other pretreatments include exposure to or incorporation of antimicrobials, pigments, and densification or softening agents. Fibers pretreated with other chemicals, such as thermoplastic and thermosetting resins, also may be used. Combinations of pretreatments also may be employed. Absorbent webs may also be similarly treated after web formation.

The paragraph beginning at page 11, line 9, has been amended as follows:

Any of the previously noted cellulosic fibers or pretreated cellulosic fibers treated with particle binders and/or densification/softness aids known in the art can also be employed in accordance with the present invention. The particle binders serve to attach other materials, such as superabsorbent polymers, to the cellulosic fibers. Cellulosic fibers treated with suitable particle binders and/or densification/softness aids and the process for combining them with cellulose fibers are disclosed in the following U.S. patents and patent applications: (1) Patent No. 5,543,215, entitled "Polymeric Binders for Binding Particles to Fibers"; (2) Patent No. 5,538,783, entitled "Non-Polymeric Organic Binders for Binding Particles to Fibers"; (3) Patent No. 5,300,192, entitled "Wet Laid Fiber Sheet Manufacturing With Reactivatable Binders for Binding Particles to Binders;" (4) Patent No. 5,352,480, entitled "Method for Binding Particle to Fibers Using Reactivatable Binders"; (5) Patent No. 5,308,896, entitled

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"Particle Binders for High-Bulk Fibers"; (6) Serial No. 07/931,279, now U.S. Patent No. 5,589,256, filed August 17, 1992, entitled "Particle Binders that Enhance Fiber Densification"; (7) Serial No. 08/107,469, now U.S. Patent No. 5,672,418, filed August 17, 1993, entitled "Particle Binders"; (8) Serial No. 08/108,219, now U.S. Patent No. 5,607,759, filed August 17, 1993, entitled "Particle Binding to Fibers"; (9) Serial No. 08/107,467, now U.S. Patent No. 5,693,411, filed August 17, 1993, entitled "Binders for Binding Water Soluble Particles to Fibers"; (10) Patent No. 5,547,745, entitled "Particle Binders"; (11) Serial No. 08/108,218, now U.S. Patent No. 5,641,561, filed August 17, 1993, entitled "Particle Binding to Fibers"; and (12) Patent No. 5,308,896, entitled "Particle Binders for High-Bulk Fibers," all expressly incorporated herein by reference. One example of a suitable densification/softness aid is a mixture of 70% sorbitol and 30% glycerin. The absorbent is treated with sorbitol and glycerin by spraying the absorbent with the mixture or passing the absorbent through a curtain coater, or other means familiar to those skilled in the art of adding a liquid to an absorbent sheet.

The paragraph beginning at page 14, line 34, has been amended as follows:

As noted above, the binder utilized in accordance with the present invention can also be a soluble bonding medium that can be incorporated with the pulped cellulosic fibers, either in fiber form, or as particles or granules. If desired, the bonding medium can also be coated onto solvent-insoluble fibers, such as cellulosic fibers, which can then be distributed throughout the matrix of fibers making up each of the strata of the present invention. It is presently preferred that the bonding medium comprise a fiber and be mixed with the components of each stratum prior to the formation of the absorbent. The use of soluble bonding mediums with cellulose fiber webs is disclosed in U. S. patent application Serial No. 08/669,406, now U.S. Patent

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No. 5,837,627, filed July 3, 1996, entitled "Fibrous Web Having Improved Strength and Method of Making the Same," expressly incorporated herein by reference.

The paragraph beginning at page 17, line 34, has been amended as follows:

In another aspect, the present invention provides methods for producing a unitary stratified composite. Generally, the unitary stratified composite is formed by forming a first stratum (as described above) on a second stratum (as described above), or the reverse. Intimate connection of the first stratum to the second stratum, and the formation of the transition zone, occurs when the two strata are laid down as described below. The unitary stratified composite of the present invention may be formed by an air-laid process, a wet-laid process, or a foam-formed process. A unitary stratified composite can be produced in accordance with the present invention in a variety of methods including, for example, air-laid or wet-laid web forming techniques known to those of ordinary skill in the pulp processing art. Representative examples of air-laid and wet-laid processes are disclosed in U.S. patent applications: Serial No. 08/337,642, filed November 10, 1994, entitled "Densified Cellulose Fiber Pads and Methods of Making the Same," and Serial No. 08/669,406, now U.S. Patent No. 5,837,627, filed July 3, 1996, entitled "Fibrous Web Having Improved Strength and Method of Making the Same," both expressly incorporated herein by reference. The absorbent can also be produced by foam processes known in the art. See, for example, U.S. Patents Nos. 3,716,449; 3,839,142; 3,871,952; 3,937,273; 3,938,782; 3,947,315; 4,166,090; 4,257,754; and 5,215,627, assigned to Wiggins Teape and related to the formation of fibrous materials from foamed aqueous fiber suspensions, expressly incorporated herein by reference. Generally, the methods for forming the unitary stratified composite of this invention include the sequential or simultaneous laying down of a first stratum (e.g., the components of the second stratum) followed by the laying down of a second stratum (e.g., the components of the first stratum) on the first laid stratum. The strata can also be laid in

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reverse order. The formed strata are then subjected to conditions sufficient to effect bonding (i.e., air drying and heating) between and within the strata to provide the unitary stratified composite of the invention. The processed web can be delivered in roll form, spooled form, or otherwise. Preferably, the method includes festooning as a finishing step.

In the Claims:

1. (Amended) An absorbent article, comprising:

an absorbent unitary composite, comprising a first stratum, a second stratum, and a transition zone intermediate and coextensive with the first stratum and the second [strata] stratum;

the first stratum comprising hydrophobic fibers and a binder;

the second stratum comprising a binder and fibers selected from the group consisting of hydrophilic fibers, hydrophobic fibers, and mixtures thereof; and

the transition zone comprising fibers from the first stratum and the second [strata] stratum commingled substantially uniformly across the composite's width and along the composite's length.

2. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 1, wherein [the hydrophobic fibers comprise] at least one of the first or the second stratum comprises synthetic fibers.

3. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 1, wherein the [hydrophilic fibers comprise] second stratum further comprises crosslinked cellulosic fibers.

4. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 1, wherein [the binder is] at least one of the binders comprises a bicomponent fiber [and] or a wet strength agent.

5. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 1, wherein the article is [at least one of] a feminine care product, an infant diaper, [and] or an adult incontinence product.

6. (Amended) An absorbent article, comprising:

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(a) a liquid pervious topsheet;

(b) an absorbent unitary composite, comprising a first stratum, a second stratum, and a transition zone intermediate and coextensive with the first stratum and the second [strata] stratum;

the first stratum comprising hydrophobic fibers and a binder;

the second stratum comprising a binder and fibers selected from the group consisting of hydrophilic fibers, hydrophobic fibers, and mixtures thereof; and

the transition zone comprising fibers from the first stratum and the second [strata] stratum commingled substantially uniformly across the composite's width and along the composite's length; and

(c) a liquid impervious backsheet.

7. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 6, wherein [the hydrophobic fibers comprise] at least one of the first or the second stratum comprises synthetic fibers.

8. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 6, wherein the [hydrophilic fibers comprise] second stratum further comprises crosslinked cellulosic fibers.

9. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 6, wherein [the binder is] at least one of the binders comprises a bicomponent fiber [and] or a wet strength agent.

10. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 6, wherein the article is [at least one of] a feminine care product, an infant diaper, [and] or an adult incontinence product.

11. (Amended) An absorbent article, comprising:

(a) a liquid pervious topsheet;

(b) an absorbent unitary composite, comprising a first stratum, a second stratum, and a transition zone intermediate and coextensive with the first stratum and the second [strata] stratum;

the first stratum comprising hydrophobic fibers and a binder;  
the second stratum comprising a binder and fibers selected from the group consisting of hydrophilic fibers, hydrophobic fibers, and mixtures thereof; and  
the transition zone comprising fibers from the first stratum and the second [strata] stratum commingled substantially uniformly across the composite's width and along the composite's length;

- (c) a storage stratum comprising an absorbent fibrous material; and
- (d) a liquid impervious backsheet.

12. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 11, wherein [the hydrophobic fibers comprise] at least one of the first or the second stratum comprises synthetic fibers.

13. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 11, wherein the [hydrophilic fibers comprise] second stratum further comprises crosslinked cellulosic fibers.

14. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 11, wherein [the binder is] at least one of the binders comprises a bicomponent fiber [and] or a wet strength agent.

15. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 11, wherein the article is [at least one of] an infant diaper [and] or an adult incontinence product.

16. (Amended) An absorbent article, comprising:  
(a) a liquid pervious topsheet;  
(b) an absorbent composite, comprising a first stratum, a second stratum, and a transition zone intermediate and coextensive with the first stratum and the second [strata] stratum;

the first stratum comprising hydrophobic fibers and a binder;  
the second stratum comprising a binder and fibers selected from the group consisting of hydrophilic fibers, hydrophobic fibers, and mixtures thereof; and

the transition zone comprising fibers from the first stratum and the second [strata] stratum commingled substantially uniformly across the composite's width and along the composite's length;

- (c) a storage stratum comprising an absorbent fibrous material;
- (d) an intermediate stratum interposed between the absorbent composite and the storage stratum; and
- (e) a liquid impervious backsheet.

17. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 16, wherein [the hydrophobic fibers comprise] at least one of the first or the second stratum comprises synthetic fibers.

18. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 16, wherein the [hydrophilic fibers comprise] second stratum further comprises crosslinked cellulosic fibers.

19. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 16, wherein [the binder is] at least one of the binders comprises a bicomponent fiber [and] or a wet strength agent.

24. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 23, wherein [the hydrophilic fibers comprise] at least one of the second or the distribution stratum comprises crosslinked cellulosic fibers.

25. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 23, wherein [the hydrophilic fibers comprise] at least one of the second or the distribution stratum comprises crosslinked eucalyptus fibers.

26. (Amended) An absorbent article, comprising:  
an absorbent unitary composite, comprising a first stratum, a second stratum, and a transition zone intermediate and coextensive with the first stratum and the second [strata] stratum;

the first stratum comprising first fibers and a binder;

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the second stratum comprising second fibers and a binder; and  
the transition zone comprising fibers from the first stratum and the second [strata] stratum commingled substantially uniformly across the composite's width and along the composite's length.

29. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 26, wherein [the binder is] at least one of the binders comprises a bicomponent fiber [and] or a wet strength agent.

30. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 26, wherein the article is [at least one of] a feminine care product, an infant diaper, [and] or an adult incontinence product.

31. (Amended) An absorbent article, comprising:

(a) a liquid pervious topsheet;  
(b) an absorbent unitary composite, comprising a first stratum, a second stratum, and a transition zone intermediate and coextensive with the first stratum and the second [strata] stratum;

the first stratum comprising first fibers and a binder;  
the second stratum comprising second fibers and a binder; and  
the transition zone comprising fibers from the first stratum and the second [strata] stratum commingled substantially uniformly across the composite's width and along the composite's length; and

(c) a liquid impervious backsheet.

34. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 31, wherein [the binder is] at least one of the binders comprises a bicomponent fiber [and] or a wet strength agent.

35. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 31, wherein the article is [at least one of] a feminine care product, an infant diaper, [and] or an adult incontinence product.

36. (Amended) An absorbent article, comprising:

(a) a liquid pervious topsheet;  
(b) an absorbent unitary composite, comprising a first stratum, a second stratum, and a transition zone intermediate and coextensive with the first stratum and the second [strata] stratum;

the first stratum comprising first fibers and a binder;

the second stratum comprising second fibers and a binder; and

the transition zone comprising fibers from the first stratum and the second [strata] stratum commingled substantially uniformly across the composite's width and along the composite's length;

- (c) a storage stratum comprising an absorbent fibrous material; and
- (d) a liquid impervious backsheet.

39. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 36, wherein [the binder is] at least one of the binders comprises a bicomponent fiber [and] or a wet strength agent.

40. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 36, wherein the article is [at least one of] an infant diaper [and] or an adult incontinence product.

41. (Amended) An absorbent article, comprising:

- (a) a liquid pervious topsheet;
- (b) an absorbent composite, comprising a first stratum, a second stratum, and a transition zone intermediate and coextensive with the first stratum and the second [strata] stratum;

the first stratum comprising first fibers and a binder;

the second stratum comprising second fibers and a binder; and

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the transition zone comprising fibers from the first stratum and the second [strata] stratum commingled substantially uniformly across the composite's width and along the composite's length;

- (c) a storage stratum comprising an absorbent fibrous material;
- (d) an intermediate stratum interposed between the absorbent composite and the storage stratum; and
- (e) a liquid impervious backsheet.

44. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 41, wherein [the binder is] at least one of the binders comprises a bicomponent fiber [and] or a wet strength agent.

51. (Amended) An absorbent article, comprising:

an absorbent unitary composite, comprising a first stratum, a second stratum, and a transition zone intermediate and coextensive with the first stratum and the second [strata] stratum;

the first stratum comprising synthetic fibers and a binder;

the second stratum comprising crosslinked cellulosic fibers and a binder; and

the transition zone comprising fibers from the first stratum and the second [strata] stratum commingled substantially uniformly across the composite's width and along the composite's length.

52. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 51, wherein [the binder is] at least one of the binders comprises a bicomponent fiber [and] or a wet strength agent.

53. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 51, wherein the article is [at least one of] a feminine care product, an infant diaper, [and] or an adult incontinence product.

54. (Amended) An absorbent article, comprising:

- (a) a liquid pervious topsheet;

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(b) an absorbent unitary composite, comprising a first stratum, a second stratum, and a transition zone intermediate and coextensive with the first stratum and the second [strata] stratum;

the first stratum comprising synthetic fibers and a binder;

the second stratum comprising crosslinked cellulosic fibers and a binder; and

the transition zone comprising fibers from the first stratum and the second [strata] stratum commingled substantially uniformly across the composite's width and along the composite's length; and

(c) a liquid impervious backsheet.

55. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 54, wherein [the binder is] at least one of the binders comprises a bicomponent fiber [and] or a wet strength agent.

56. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 54, wherein the article is [at least one of] a feminine care product, an infant diaper, [and] or an adult incontinence product.

57. (Amended) An absorbent article, comprising:

(a) a liquid pervious topsheet;

(b) an absorbent unitary composite, comprising a first stratum, a second stratum, and a transition zone intermediate and coextensive with the first stratum and the second [strata] stratum;

the first stratum comprising synthetic fibers and a binder;

the second stratum comprising crosslinked cellulosic fibers and a binder; and

the transition zone comprising fibers from the first stratum and the second [strata] stratum commingled substantially uniformly across the composite's width and along the composite's length;

(c) a storage stratum comprising an absorbent fibrous material; and

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(d) a liquid impervious backsheet.

58. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 57, wherein [the binder is] at least one of the binders comprises a bicomponent fiber [and] or a wet strength agent.

59. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 57, wherein the article is [at least one of] an infant diaper [and] or an adult incontinence product.

60. (Amended) An absorbent article, comprising:

(a) a liquid pervious topsheet;

(b) an absorbent composite, comprising a first stratum, a second stratum, and a transition zone intermediate and coextensive with the first stratum and the second [strata] stratum;

the first stratum comprising synthetic fibers and a binder;

the second stratum comprising crosslinked cellulosic fibers and a binder; and

the transition zone comprising fibers from the first stratum and the second [strata] stratum commingled substantially uniformly across the composite's width and along the composite's length;

(c) a storage stratum comprising an absorbent fibrous material;

(d) an intermediate stratum interposed between the absorbent composite and the storage stratum; and

(e) a liquid impervious backsheet.

61. (Amended) The absorbent article of Claim 60, wherein [the binder is] at least one of the binders comprises a bicomponent fiber [and] or a wet strength agent.